

CHAPTER 6

NEW CONSTRUCTION - COMMERCIAL

INTRODUCTION

The construction of new commercial buildings that is visible from a public way requires the review and approval of a certificate of appropriateness by the Boards of Architectural Review. Commercial buildings include all non-residential construction such as retail stores, office buildings, churches and non-profit organization facilities.

The central commercial and retail arteries in the historic districts are Washington Street running north and south and King Street running east and west. There is also a substantial amount of commercial and retail activity

along Union Street. In addition, Patrick and Henry Street carry Route 1 north and south through the historic districts and both streets have concentrations of commercial development. In the last twenty years there has been considerable development of office space along North Washington Street and upper King Street near the Metro station. Many historic commercial properties along King Street have been rehabilitated for office and retail uses.

In the sections of the historic districts zoned for commercial development, relatively few parcels of vacant land are available for the development of new commercial construction projects without demolishing an existing structure. The demolition of an existing historic building to permit construction of a new commercial building is strongly discouraged by the Boards. Approval of the Boards is required for the demolition of any structure in the historic districts. Therefore, many new commercial projects are in-fill construction that make use of a vacant lot. In these cases, the Boards are primarily concerned with the compatibility of a new building with adjacent historic structures.



New in-fill commercial office buildings.

SOURCE: 120 North Alfred Street, BAR Case #89-106, Lewis & Associates, Architects

These guidelines apply to all new construction projects that lie outside of the waterfront area or which do not front on Washington Street. Commercial construction projects in these areas must meet additional requirements and these are set forth in the Guidelines for Washington Street and the Guidelines for the Waterfront. The waterfront area is defined in the Zoning Ordinance as Height District #3, Potomac River, whose boundaries are east of Union Street to the River and extend from Pendleton Street south to the Woodrow Wilson Bridge (§6-400 of the Zoning Ordinance).

The guidelines should be viewed as a distillation of previously accepted design approaches in the historic districts. The guidelines should not be viewed as a device that dictates a specific design response nor should the guidelines be viewed as prohibiting a particular design approach. There may be better ways to meet some design objectives that have not been reviewed by the Boards in the past. New and untried approaches to common design problems are encouraged and should not be rejected out of hand simply because they appear to be outside the common practices outlined in the guidelines.

Architectural styles in Alexandria have been more conservative than in other parts of the country. The approvals of the Boards have reflected this since the establishment of the historic districts. As a general rule, the Boards favor contextual background buildings which allow historic structures to maintain the primary visual importance. Singular buildings in the latest architectural vocabulary are generally discouraged.

It is not the intention of the Boards to dilute design creativity in new commercial buildings. Rather, the Boards seek to promote compatible development that is, at once, both responsive to the needs and tastes of the late 20th century while being compatible with the historic character of the districts. This balancing act will clearly be different in different sections of the historic districts.

These guidelines should be used in conjunction with the guidelines for specific architectural elements contained in Chapter 2. For example, that chapter contains information on such topics as window and door treatments, siding and chimneys and flues which must be appropriately combined to create a building that is compatible with the architecture in the districts.



New three story brick and masonry office building.

SOURCE: 1416 Prince Street, BAR Case #88-63, Lewis & Associates, Architects

As a general rule, the Boards do not review conceptual design plans. The Boards strongly prefer to review complete design submissions. Therefore, applicants are encouraged to meet with B.A.R. Staff as early as possible during the design development stage to review proposals and zoning requirements.

REQUIREMENTS

- All applications for new construction must comply with the requirements of the zoning regulations prior to consideration by the Boards of Architectural Review. The specific requirements may be obtained from the Zoning Administrator (703/838-4688).
- New construction must conform to the requirements of the applicable small area chapter of the Master Plan. In the Old and Historic Alexandria District, the Small Area Plan chapters include Old Town, Old Town North, Northeast and Potomac Yard/Potomac Greens. In the Parker-Gray District, the Small Area Plan chapters are Brad-dock Road Metro Station and Northeast.
- Vision clearance
There is a general City requirement tha

buildings on corner lots must maintain a vision clearance at the corner for purposes of transportation safety. In such instances, structures may be no higher than 42" (3' 6") above the curb. There is also a general policy to maintain the building line in the historic districts. Therefore, the Zoning Ordinance gives the Boards the power to waive this requirement as well as other yard requirements in the vision clearance area where it determines that the maintenance of the building line is important to the character of the blockface.

- Building height for commercial construction is limited to 50 feet. However, this varies somewhat depending on the zoning of a particular parcel.
- New commercial building projects over 3,000 square feet in area or which are closer than 66 feet to land used or residentially zoned require the approval of a Site Plan by the Planning Commission. The site plan must be prepared by a professional engineer or land surveyor and must include building massing studies. (See §11-400 of the Zoning Ordinance). Information on Site Plan requirements may be obtained from the Site Plan Coordinator, Department of Transport-



Proposal for a new hotel in a Federal Revival style of architecture.

SOURCE: 116 South Alfred Street, BAR Approval 1/19/83, Bairley & Maginnis, P.C., Architects

tation and Environmental Services, Room 4130, City Hall (Telephone: 703/838-4318).

New commercial construction which requires the approval of a Site Plan must comply with the provisions of the Alexandria Archaeological Protection Procedure (§11-411 of the Zoning Ordinance). The specific requirements may be obtained from the City Archaeologist, Alexandria Archaeology, 105 North Union Street, 3rd Floor. (Telephone: (703/838-4399).

- Construction of all new buildings must meet the requirements of the Virginia Uniform Statewide Building Code (USBC) and requires the issuance of a building permit by Code Enforcement.
- Construction of new commercial buildings must meet the requirements of the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA).
- Tree removal for new construction requires approval of the City Arborist.
- Generally, new commercial construction must include parking. The requirements vary depending upon the size of the building. (See Article 8 of the Zoning Ordinance.)

nance.)

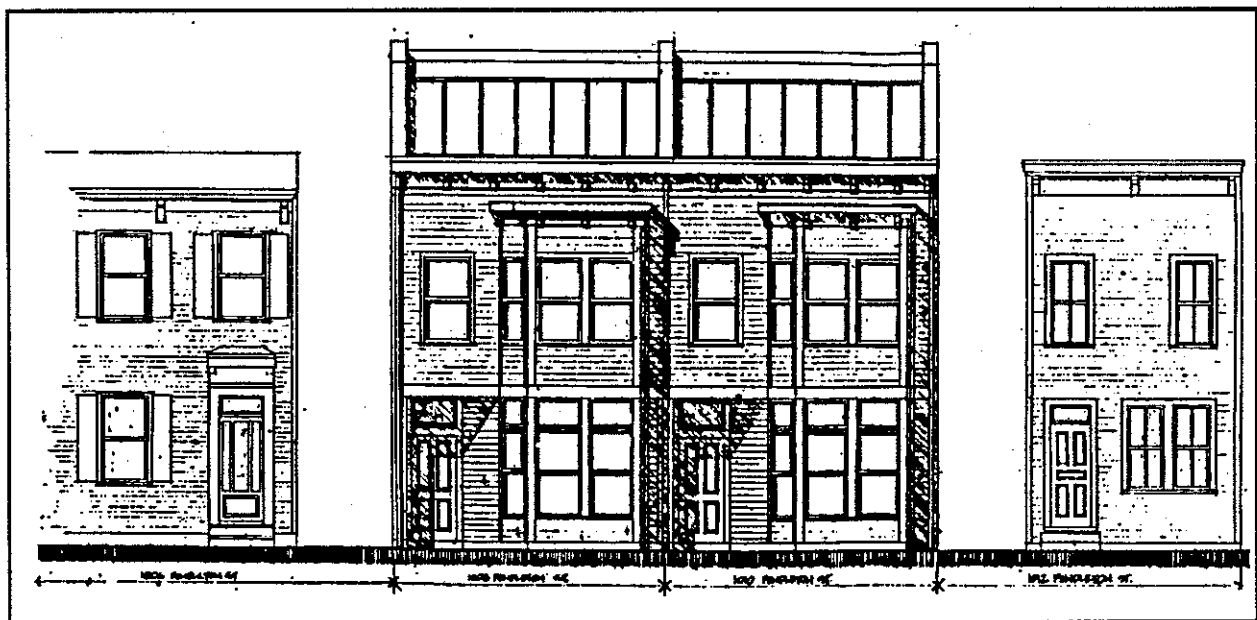
- New commercial construction which involves land disturbance of 2,500 square feet or more of land area must comply with the requirements of the Chesapeake Bay Protection Ordinance.

GUIDELINES

- Applicants should consult Building Alterations, Chapter 2, regarding guidelines for specific elements of a proposed new building. For example, Chapter 2 provides information on compatible window treatments, paint colors and building materials.

Style

No single architectural style is mandated. However, there is strong preference on the part of the Boards for buildings which reflect the traditional architectural styles found in the historic districts. Designs generally should complement and reflect the architectural heritage of the City. For example, abstraction of historic design elements is preferred to a building design which introduces elements that have no historical basis in the districts. Additionally, direct copying of



Proposal for two new in-fill townhouse office buildings with mansard style roofs. From the street the buildings appear to be two stories in height because the mansard roof is set back.

SOURCE: 1008-1010 Pendleton Street, BAR Case #89-38PG, John Savage, Architect, P.C.

buildings is discouraged.

- **Massing**

Building massing is the enclosed volume which constitutes a building's exterior form. In the historic districts, new commercial construction should reflect the building massing prevailing along the blockface. For example, uneven massing should be avoided along a blockface which has buildings of uniform massing.

- **Height**

Building height should generally reflect the existing heights of buildings along the blockface of the proposed new construction.

- **Width**

The width of commercial buildings varies widely along the principal commercial streets in the historic districts. In general, building width should reflect the prevailing pattern in the immediate vicinity of the proposed project. For example, a new commercial building along King Street should reflect the relatively narrow 25-35 foot ur-

ban row building pattern that prevails.

- **Siting**

In general, new commercial buildings should be sited so that the front plane of the building reflects the prevailing front setback pattern along the blockface.

- **Parking**

Parking should be provided within or behind a new structure. Parking lots to the side of a building and open to the street disrupt the traditional street wall and are strongly discouraged. Additional information is provided in the Parking section of Chapter 2, Building Alterations.

- **Fenestration**

The fenestration pattern, that is the relationship of solid to void, such as walls and windows, should be compatible with the historic fenestration patterns in the districts. For example, office and commercial buildings which express very large areas of void are discouraged.

Sufficient reveals around windows to ex-

ARCHAEOLOGICAL CONSIDERATIONS

The construction of new commercial buildings creates ground disturbing activities which may affect archaeological resources. With its rich history, the City of Alexandria is particularly concerned about its archaeological heritage. Archaeological resources in the historic districts are great in number and highly diverse in materials. They often consist of ceramic and glass fragments in the backyards of historic properties; however, archaeological resources are also brick-lined shafts in yards and basements; brick kilns; foundations, footings, postholes and builders trenches of non-extant buildings; landscape features such as walkways and gardens; and even American Indian artifacts which pre-date colonial Alexandria. Often these clues to the City's past appear to be unimportant debris, yet when the artifacts and building remains are excavated and recorded systematically, they provide the only knowledge of lost Alexandria.

Every application to the B.A.R. which potentially involves ground disturbance is reviewed by the City Archaeologist to determine whether significant archaeological resources may

still survive on the property. Therefore, the potential for additional requirements to protect archaeological resources exists with any project that involves ground disturbing activities.

The applicant can speed along the archaeological review process by requesting a Preliminary Archaeological Assessment from Alexandria Archaeology at the earliest date. Call (703) 838-4399, Tuesday through Saturday. Alexandria Archaeology is located on the third floor of the Torpedo Factory Art Center.

- **COMMERCIAL ZONES**

In commercial zones, the ground disturbing activities associated with the construction of new buildings may necessitate compliance with the Alexandria Archaeological Protection Procedure (§ 11-411 of the Zoning Ordinance). The specific requirements may be obtained from the City Archaeologist. Occasionally, compliance in such projects may require the property owner to contract with an independent archaeologist to document conditions before and during construction. Property owners should contact the City Archaeologist as early as possible so that there are no project delays.

press the thickness of materials is strongly encouraged.

First floor retail uses should generally be expressed through large storefront windows. This reflects the historical pattern of usage of first floor space along the commercial corridors of the historic districts.

- Roof

The roof form should reflect the roof forms expressed along the blockface. In addition, roofing materials should reflect the traditional use of wood, metal and slate in the historic districts. Additional information is provided in the Roofing section of Chapter 2, Building Alterations.

- Spacing Between Buildings

The spacing between a new commercial building and existing structures should reflect the pattern of spacing between buildings evident along the blockface to maintain a consistent rhythm. For example, along King Street there should be zero spacing between buildings. In areas where commercial and residential zoning abut, a transition space must be maintained which may effect traditional building relationships.

- Architectural Detailing

Architectural detailing such as cornices, lintels, arches, and chimneys should express the traditional quality and quantity of architectural detailing found on historic structures throughout the districts.

Side and rear walls which face open areas should be designed with as much attention to detail as the primary facade. It is the general preference of the Boards that surface articulation be provided on otherwise unrelieved side walls to break-up apparent massing through such means as the articulation of false windows, pilasters and changes in brick patterns.

- Directional Expression

The orientation of a building to the street is important. The relationship of height and width of a proposed new commercial building should reflect the prevailing pattern along the blockface. For example, a wide one-story building would not be appropriate

among the narrow multi-story buildings lining King Street.

- Materials

The predominant building materials for commercial buildings in the historic districts are wood and brick. In addition, there are several stone buildings. Stucco coatings were very rarely used in the historic districts. The building materials for new commercial structures should reflect these traditional materials.

- Building Orientation

The principal architectural facade should face the street. The front entrances of new commercial buildings should be open to the principal street frontage of the building. Entrances for new commercial construction must meet the requirements for accessibility for persons with disabilities established by the ADA and the Virginia USBC.

- Utilities

While the Boards are cognizant of 20th century infrastructure requirements, such items as electrical meters and transformers, HVAC equipment and solid waste management equipment should be visually and acoustically screened from public view.

- Color

The colors proposed for new commercial buildings should be compatible with those in use on historic buildings in the districts. The B.A.R. Staff has developed a *Color Chart of Historically Accurate Paint Colors in the Old and Historic Alexandria District and the Parker-Gray District* which can be consulted to help determine appropriate colors which reflect the historic heritage of the City.

APPLICATION REQUIREMENTS

In order to properly evaluate the appropriateness of a design for new construction, the Boards of Architectural Review require that an accurate depiction of the design be presented. Sketches are not acceptable. Most designs for construction of new buildings presented to the Boards of Architectural Review are prepared by design professionals

such as architects and engineers; however, a professionally prepared submission is not mandatory. Applicants, however, should be aware that drawings sealed by an architect or engineer licensed in Virginia may be required by the Code Enforcement Bureau prior to the issuance of a building permit.

All applications for approval of new commercial construction must contain the following information:

Alexandria Business License

Proof of a valid Alexandria Business License is required at the time of application for contractors, subcontractors, architects and designers.

Photograph of Existing Conditions

Clear photographs of the site and the surrounding properties are required for reference.

Plot Plan/Site Plan

A plot or site plan accurately showing the location and dimensions of the footprint of the new building including property lines, accessory structures, fences and gradelines as well as existing improvements is required. A roof plan showing water drainage and location of mechanical units should also be indicated.

Drawings

Drawings accurately representing all elevations of the proposed structure indicating materials and overall dimensions, including height, are required. In addition, a drawing showing the contextual relationship of the proposed structure to existing adjacent buildings is required. The location of such ancillary items as HVAC units, heat pumps, roof guards, fire hose connections, utility meters and risers should be noted on the drawings. The drawings should have a minimum scale of $3/32" = 1'$, however, larger scale drawings may be required. At least one set must meet the maximum permit size of $24" \times 36"$. Additional copies of the required drawings may be reduced if they are clearly legible.

Floor Area Ratio Calculations

Applicants must provide accurate F.A.R.

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calculations for the new addition. Forms for these calculations are available at the time of application.

Materials

The materials to be used for the structure must be specified and delineated on the drawings. Actual samples may be provided, if appropriate.

Color

The proposed color of the structure and trim-work must be indicated and actual color samples provided.

RELATED SECTIONS

Introduction

Guide to the B.A. R. Process

Use of the Design Guidelines

Chapter 1 - Signs

Chapter 2 - Building Alterations

Accessibility for Persons with Disabilities

Accessory Structures

Awnings

Chimneys & Flues

Roof Drainage Systems

Electrical and Gas Service

Fences, Garden Walls & Gates

HVAC Systems

Exterior Lighting

Paint Colors

Parking

Driveways and Paving

Roofing Materials

Shutters

Siding Materials

Skylights

Solar Collectors

Exterior Staircases

Stoops, Steps and Railings

Windows

Storm Windows

Chapter 3, Building Accessories

ATM Machines

Satellite Antennas

Chapter 4, Demolition of Existing Structures

NOTE: Illustrations are provided for information only. Applications for certificates of appropriateness are reviewed and approved on a case-by-case basis.

ADOPTED BY THE BOARDS OF
ARCHITECTURAL REVIEW, 5/25/93

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